UPDATE

Gay rights debate gets ugly

Supporters, critics report hate crimes

By **Louis Aguilar**
Gazette Telegraph

How do you gauge intolerance and hate?

In the wake of Amendment 2, that's a point of political contention between supporters and critics of the controversial ban on laws protecting homosexuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

But both sides agree the number of hate crimes recognized by local police agencies since passage of Amendment 2 does not reflect the level of harassment and intolerance stirred up by the issue.

In Teller and El Paso counties, only three incidents related to sexual orientation or Amendment 2 have been labeled as hate crimes since the November election. All three targeted homosexuals.

But anonymous threats, verbal confrontations, and vandalism are widespread, Amendment 2 supporters and opponents said.

But the Gazette Telegraph found 32 people who said they believe they were harassed because of their views on Amendment 2 or their sexual orientation. The allegations surfaced through the paper's independent research and through Ground Zero, a gay rights group in Colorado Springs founded to fight Amendment 2, and Colorado For Family Values, the Springs-based group that authored the amendment.

Colorado Police spokesman Lt. Rich Resling says the department's numbers on hate crimes may be inaccurate. "But they are not grossly inaccurate," he said. "Maybe you found one or two cases not classified as a hate crime, but it's not like we overlooked 50 of them."

It can be difficult to tell where the truth lies between the police figures and the number of alleged hate crimes. It's a little understood crime designation without much bite. In many cases, there is no way to substantiate the allegations. And in the debate over Amendment 2, the term itself — hate crime — has become increasingly politicized.

See **GAY**/B5

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Parks board seeks applicant for vacancy

Gazette Telegraph

The El Paso County Board of County Commissioners has a vacancy on its Park Advisory Board. Members of the board review and comment on items related to county park policies and objectives. It meets at 1:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month.

Applicants must live in Commissioner District 4. The deadline to apply is Friday. Interested people should send a letter of interest and brief resume, including day phone, to El Paso County Board of County Commissioners, 27 E. Vermijo Ave., Colorado Springs 80903. Call 520-6444 for information.

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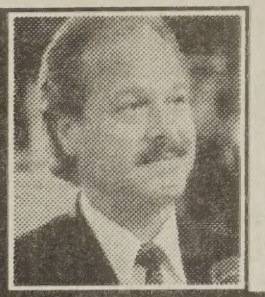

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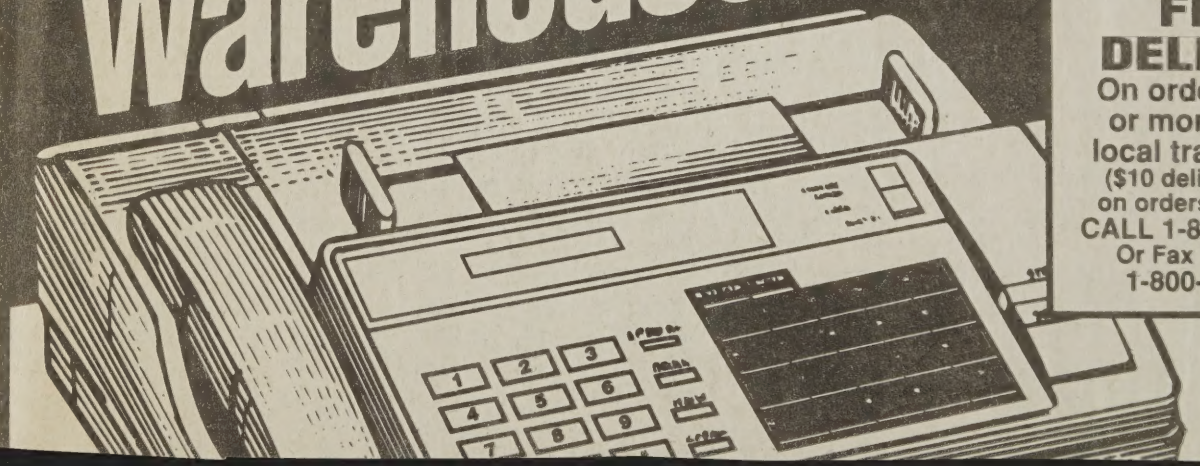

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Gay/Police, citizens differ on number of hate crimes

From B1

The gay community and other Amendment 2 critics say police figures on hate crimes are far too low. They are stepping up efforts to record and publicize incidents of harassment. Earlier this month, the Gay and Lesbian Community Center created a 24-hour hot line for gays to call regarding harassing incidents. They have received about 100 calls.

The calls will be compiled by trained counselors, in part as evidence to support the gay community's contention that Amendment 2 is a tool of intolerace and hate.

Amendment 2 supporters, on the other hand, use the police figure to argue that the amendment has not infringed on the civil rights of the gay community or increased intolerance toward homosexuals.

But both sides have war stories to tell.

Speaking before the state Legislature last week, Kevin Tebedo, director of Colorado for Family Values, said he and his family have received death threats. He also mentioned the incidents to a recent crowd of Amendment 2 supporters in Monte Vista.

"Ask the Tebedo family about the death threats we've gotten," he told the crowd of 120. "That will tell you where the intolerance really is."

Spokespeople for Ground Zero say its supporters have suffered a broad range of harassment, from death threats to less severe forms of intimidation.

"A lot of gays and lesbians are facing low-key intimidation," said Julie Cooper, spokeswoman for Ground Zero. "Something that makes you a little bit nervous, a little bit more aware of where you're at."

Few hate crime victims file reports, police say

A number of factors contribute to the disparity between the police figure on hate crimes and the widespread allegations of harassment.

Few of the alleged victims fill out police reports, either for fear of going public about their sexual orientation or because they were unsure if the incident warranted police action. Only 10 of the 32 people interviewed for this story filed police reports after they were allegedly harassed.

Often, an incident the victim believes to be a hate crime is classified under other crime categories, such as vandalism or assault, or it turns out not to be a crime in the first place.

In addition, crimes that are politically motivated are not considered hate crimes, and area police agencies consider Amendment 2 to be primarily a political issue.

Moreover, police aren't aggressively recording incidents of harassment that may fit their definition of a hate crime.

Colorado Springs police use a Federal Bureau of Investigation definition of hate crimes: criminal offenses motivated by a bias against the victim's race, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

The Colorado Springs Police Department reports local hate crimes to the FBI, but pursuing such crimes is not a high priority.

"It really is just a label we use for the media and the FBI," Resling said. "It's a nice number to have on the books, but we are under no obligation to do it."

Even the Colorado Springs Police Department is uncertain why some harassment cases are classified as hate crimes while others are not.

Ground Zero spokeswoman Julie Cooper reported to Colorado Springs police that she had received two anonymous phone calls in the middle of the night from a caller saying "I'm going to kill you." Cooper told police the death threats came after she was pictured in newspapers and on TV participating in an anti-Amendment 2 rally.

Police didn't label the incident as a hate crime because the caller never mentioned her sexual orientation, said Sgt. Larry Herbert, a Colorado Springs Police spokesman.

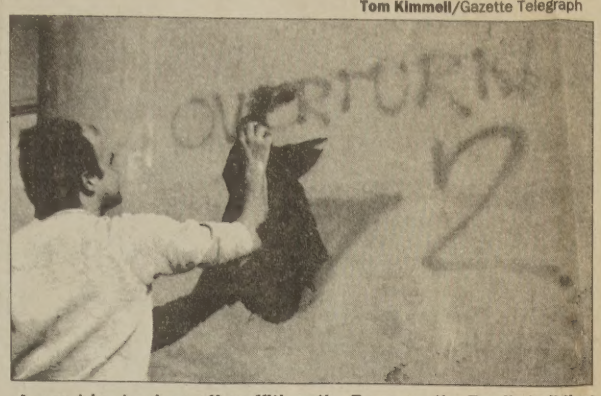
But police did label a 1992 incident a hate crime when a Colorado Springs woman found a picture of a nude centerfold in her mailbox.

The photo was left with no note or explanation. Police classified it as a hate crime because the victim worked for Focus on the Family, and police believed the photo was meant as an affront to her religious beliefs.

Why was one case a hate crime while the other was not?

"Gee, that's a good question. I don't really know, in my mind there isn't much difference based on what you told me," said Herbert.

Tom Kimmell/Gazette Telegraph



A man tries to clean off graffiti on the Focus on the Family building. Three college students received a summons for the crime.

> "A lot of gays and lesbians are facing low-key intimidation. Something that makes you a little bit nervous, a little bit more aware of where you're at."
>
> **Julie Cooper, spokeswoman for Ground Zero**

Some acts don't fall under definition of hate crime

Two cases of vandalism that appear to be related to the fight over Amendment 2 were not classified as hate crimes.

Shortly after the November passage of Amendment 2, a glass door was broken out at Poor Richard's Restaurant. Richard Skorman, owner of the restaurant, told police that a man who called to claim responsibility for the crime said he did it because the business has several gay employees, Skorman said.

A Colorado Springs Police Department press release about hate crime allegations in 1992 said the Poor Richard's incident was not a hate crime because there was no evidence that it was ethnically motivated.

"I never related (to police) that it could be ethnically motivated. I never suspected that was the case," Skorman said.

No arrest was made because police could not find a suspect.

Another vandalism case targeted Focus on the Family, an international Christian broadcast ministry based in Colorado Springs.

In February, anti-Amendment 2 slogans and pink triangles, the symbol Nazis used during World War II to identify homosexuals, were spray painted on the ministry's headquarters.

"How would we classify that?" Lt. Resling said. "As an anti-Christian act? A politically-motivated act? Or pro-gay? You could almost take your choice."

Police chose not to guess, and treated it simply as a case of vandalism. Three Colorado college students have received summonses for Class 2 misdemeanors in the case.

Hate crimes hard to prove and prosecute, police say

A case in Woodland Park illustrates how hard it can be to prosecute acts of suspected harassment and bigotry, even if sexual orientation is a clear motivating factor.

Witnesses reported two women who were posting anti-gay fliers in parking lots at various Woodland Park businesses. The fliers said that two women who worked at a local convenience store were a lesbian couple, and warned that customers were in danger of contracting AIDS and hepatitis.

Police said one of the suspects had been fired at the convenience store by one of the women named in the fliers. Police issued a summons to the two women after they allegedly returned to the store and tried to start a fight.

Mary Kelley/Gazette Telegraph

Maggie Abrams sits in the window of her Manitou Springs jewelry shop with a sign blasting controversial Amendment 2.

> "Ask the Tebedo family about the death threats we've gotten. That will tell you where the intolerance really is."
>
> **Kevin Tebedo, director, Colorado for Family Values**

The women have continued to distribute the fliers, but police say they can't do anything about it.

Meanwhile the stress has gotten to one of the women targeted in the flier. She was hospitalized for a day, suffering from exhaustion. Shortly afterward she quit her job and left the Woodland Park area.

Said Woodland Park Police Capt. Mike Rulo: "It's not like I don't sympathize, but it really is just a civil dispute."

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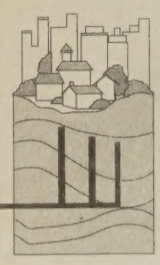

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STATE

Wray among finalists vying for 1993 All-America City Award

Associated Press

WRAY — Constructing a rehabilitation center and attracting doctors has won this tiny plains town a finalist berth in the 1993 All-America City Award competition.

Located 170 miles northeast of Denver, Wray is the smallest city among the 30 finalists. It has a population of 1,998.

Each community has been invited to make a formal presentation to the All-America City Award jury May 20-22 in Tampa, Fla. The 10 winners will be named May 22.

Wray's nomination was based on three achievements: construction of the $2.3 million Wray Rehabilitation and Activities Center, which marked its first anniversary this month; plans for construction of a $6.5 million Wray Community District Hospital, scheduled to open in fall 1994; and development of the Yuma County Family Center, which offers a range of counseling services.

"We pretty much have to depend on ourselves because we are so far from a big city," said 10-year Mayor Jack Sloniker.

Central to the farm town's vitality may be its ability to attract doctors to provide health care for residents, almost one-quarter of whom are 65 or older.

The 30 finalists, chosen from a record 151 applications, range from small towns like Wray to major cities such as Philadelphia and Fort Worth, Texas.

Greeley, Colorado Springs, Grand Junction, Lamar, Leadville, Delta and Pueblo have been past winners.

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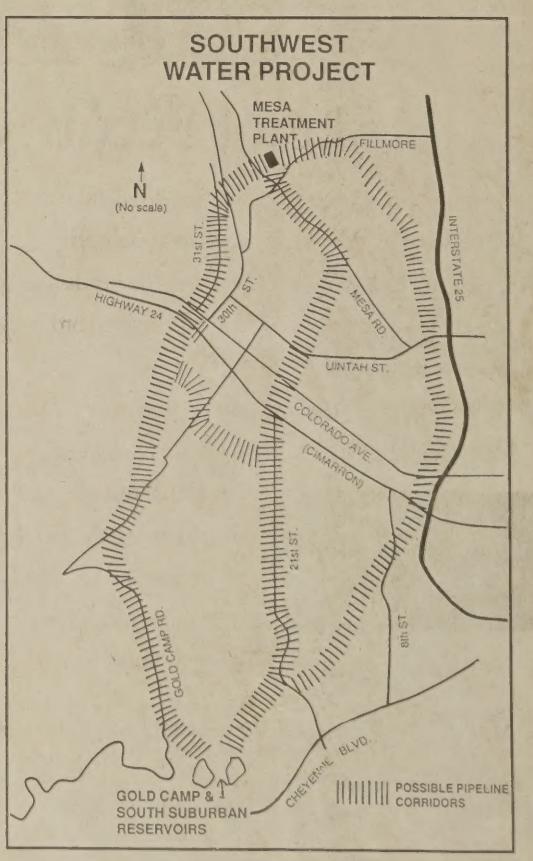

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